



## The Shootist

*Glendon Swarthout , Miles Hood Swarthout (Introduction)*

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By the author of *The Homesman*, now a major motion picture *The Shootist* is John Bernard Books, a gunfighter at the turn of the twentieth century who must confront the greatest Shootist of all: Death. Most men would end their days in bed or take their own lives, but a gunfighter has a third option, one that Books decides to exercise. He may choose his own executioner.

As word spreads that the famous assassin has incurable cancer, an assortment of human vultures gathers to feast on the corpse—among them a gambler, a rustler, a clergyman, an undertaker, an old love, a reporter, even an admiring teenager. What follows is the last courageous act in Books's own legend.

This classic, Spur Award-winning novel was chosen by the Western Writers of America as one of the best western novels ever written and was the inspiration for John Wayne's last great starring role in the acclaimed 1976 film adaptation. The Bison Books edition includes a new introduction by the author's son, Miles Swarthout, in which he discusses his father's work and the making of the legendary film.

### The Shootist Details

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Author : Glendon Swarthout , Miles Hood Swarthout (Introduction)

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## From Reader Review The Shootist for online ebook

### Jim says

Decades ago, I saw the John Wayne movie of the same name & really liked it, so thought the audio book would be decent. It wasn't, it was freaking awesome! Horrible, depressing, awfully realistic, & yet somehow inspiring. If you saw the movie, know that you saw a cleaned up, pale Hollywood version. Much is the same, but Swarthout's descriptions are intense & a little too detailed at times, but extremely moving.

The book takes place just after Queen Victoria dies & Books rides into town for his final time & buys a newspaper. He has cancer & it's killing him painfully. He spends his final days thoroughly reading the paper, every ad & article. He remembers parts of his life while doing so & in graphic dreams produced by the laudanum he's taking for the pain. It's a wonderful journey & fairly short. The characters are beautifully crafted, absolutely perfect in so many ways. Very few are truly decent, though.

I'm getting into spoiler territory & it's a journey best taken without too many expectations. Highly recommended!

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### James Joyce says

This is an impressive novel.

Yes, it's a western and some people will dismiss it, for that. But it's not (for the most part) what you think of, when you think of a western. Yes, there are a few times that guns are fired and yes, the main character is an infamous "shootist". Referred to as a killer, assassin, gunfighter, etc.. Yes.

But it's the story of a man whose time is passing as his era is passing. Dying of cancer, he comes to El Paso for a confirmation of his diagnosis, from a doctor he trusts. The novel is the tale of his rapid deterioration, in the face of his illness. His coming to terms with who he is, what he is, and finally... that he can do something good, finally, with his death.

John Wayne played this character in the movie version. J. B. Books. It was Wayne's final role, to play the aging gunfighter dying of cancer, while Wayne was dying of cancer. (they even had to pause production, to allow him time to recover from illness during filming)

Certainly, the book is grimmer, darker, and far more brutal than the film. And I'm not talking about killings. Books is slowly destroyed by the cancer as people visit him, all trying to make a profit off his impending demise.

I am very happy that I read this sad book.

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### Piker7977 says

One, of the many, things that I love about westerns is how some kind of force or metaphysical current locks a character into a path towards finality. This can be the arrival of a train, placing a bounty on someone's head, or a stranger riding into town. For aging "shootist" John Bernard Books, it is cancer. His diagnosis

begins a countdown for his remaining days, but he has a choice of going out in pitiful agony or on his own terms. As Books looks forward to his death, he discovers how empty a life he has led and when boiled down, what is most valuable to leave behind once you have departed.

This book is wonderful! It also has one of the coolest lines ever:

*He thought: Oh, I have fed on honey-dew. On wine and whiskey and champagne and the tender white meat of women and fine clothes and the respect of strong men and the fear of the weak and the turn of the card and good horses and the crisp of greenbacks and the cool of mornings and all the elbow room that God or man could ask for. I have had high times. But the best times of all were afterward, with the gun warm in my hand, the bite of smoke in my nose, the taste of death on my tongue, my heart high in my gullet, the danger past, and then the sweat, suddenly, and the nothingness, and the sweet clean feel of being born.*

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## **Richard says**

John Bernard Books has found out he has terminal prostate cancer.

Books is an aging but notorious gunman, who is known across the frontier for being dangerously quick on the draw, for loving women, and for killing over thirty men. So it comes to his dismay that he is destined to die an undignified and unremarkable death, taken down by a disease in his crotch. He doesn't have long to live and pretty soon news of his condition spreads around town. But J.B. Books is determined to die with some semblance of dignity.

*And then, emptied, on hands and knees, head hanging over his own spew, teeth chattering with cold, in that animal posture he knew fear for the first time in his adult life.*

I was really taken with this outstanding novel and this great character: a portrait of a dying man who must figure out the best way to make his last stand in life. Author Glendon Swarthout creates a three-dimensional character out of the conventionally one-dimensional Western antihero. On the outside Books is trying to portray the same stoicism and grit that he's known for, but on the inside is a man terrified of dying the way he is. Not only is he forced to look back on his life and decide if it was truly worth anything, but he also has to deal with the town's sudden interest in his imminent death, interest both curious and nefarious, but everyone looking to profit one way or another.

A great theme that is prevalent throughout the book is the changing times. It is the turn of the 20th century, year 1901, and the West is changing from the frontier that it was to a more modern, civilized place. And the aging gunman is part of those dying times. He's constantly reminded of this in every new invention he sees, or by the newspaper articles he reads to pass the time.

*She looked at him bravely now for the first time, at his face, the face from which a child had fled, and drew breath. She rose. Her eyes filled.*

*She knew.*

*He took her in his arms and kissed her ardently. Men in their hosts, young and old, innocent and corrupt, had paid her for her favors, but she put her arms about him of her own free will as though to give him what she could in recompense for this, the last gift she guessed, of his manhood.*

It was a real joy reading this book, which was tender and mournful, like a melancholy fable, downright funny

at times, and gorgeously written. Swarthout seems to always use just the right words; I felt like every page had a line or paragraph I wanted to make note of. The book also contains a stunning classic Western bar shootout that is well-crafted, dark, and nihilistic.

I would agree with critics that this is one of the best Western novels ever written (definitely one of the best that I've read). It's about courage, dignity and throwing up a middle finger to death, taking control of your life and the the way you leave it.

*He thought: I will not break. I won't tell anybody what a tight I am in. I will keep my pride.  
And my guns loaded to the last.*

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## Sam Sattler says

I have only read two Glendon Swarthout novels (The Shootist and The Homesman), but, as it turns out, they are two of my favorite books and both were made into favorite movies of mine. Swarthout, who died in 1992 at age 74, had a special talent for writing the kind of western novel that told its story by getting deeply into the heads of its characters. His westerns were not short on gunplay and the like, but Swarthout's focus was always on what motivated his characters to be the people they were and do the things they did.

The central character of The Shootist is one John Bernard Books, a nineteenth-century gunfighter with a fierce reputation as a sure-shot with a quick hand. But time is beginning to catch up with Books and now, in January 1901, he has come to El Paso to see the doctor who saved his life years earlier when Books took the only bullet that ever came near killing him. Books is in pain and he knows that something is seriously wrong with him. And when the doctor tells him that the pain is being caused by the prostate cancer that is killing him, Books knows that he will die in El Paso – and soon.

Word spreads quickly that the famous gunfighter is staying in a local boarding house, and it is only a matter of time before several gunfighters with an exaggerated estimation of their own talents begin to consider the instant fame associated with being the one to kill the famous John Bernard Books. Bond Rogers, the widow for whom the boardinghouse is her only source of income, is losing borders because of the gunfighter's presence and wants him to leave her home, something Books adamantly refuses to do. Over the course of several weeks, as the cancer progresses and Books becomes more and more helpless, the reader watches the city's vultures descend on the dying man to lay claim to every personal possession Books is willing to sell, including the very hair on his head. It seems that the death of Books is going to prove quite profitable for several of El Paso's more-enterprising merchants.

But at the heart of The Shootist is the evolving relationship between Books, his landlady, and the woman's 17-year-old son, a school dropout who has aspirations to become a gunfighter as famous as Books. Those familiar with the film version of The Shootist will remember young Gillom Bond as somewhat of an innocently naïve boy who can hardly believe his luck that the most famous gunfighter of the day is about to die in his mother's boardinghouse. This is not at all the Gillom Bond portrayed in the novel, a forum in which Gillom shows a very different temperament and plays a much more significant role in the story's climax.

Bottom Line: This is an excellent literary western, and that's the best kind. The Shootist won the Spur Award for Best Western Novel of 1975, and it is very easy to see why.

### **Kim says**

Whoa how have I never read this? I couldn't put it down.

Books is a great character.

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### **Victor Drax says**

Es cierto el cliché: Si vas a leer un libro de western, que sea este.

Una historia triste, una leyenda en su ocaso, una prosa hermosa.

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### **Mike (the Paladin) says**

I got to know about this book from the movie (staring John Wayne). If that's also your knowledge of the story all you really have is a sort of general outline of the story. It's also an outline that leads you to a different destination than the story in the novel will.

This is another book where I find myself hesitant to say things such as "I like it", or "I enjoyed it" as it is a dark and even sad story with few bright corners. I suppose it might be best here to say what's different from the movie as said movie is well know, and it's a good movie. As noted the book is darker than the movie even though they are both about the last days of a man dying of cancer the movie is a lot more hopeful.

What shall I say yet not give a spoiler? The events while based on the events in the novel are different. Many of the characters in the book (though not all) are significantly different from those in the movie.

And the end is also (to use the same word) significantly...greatly different from the movie.

Go in with the understanding this is for an adult audience (and I'm not referring to sexual content here, I'm referring to actual adult situations). It's dark and you have to dig to find hope or a silver lining. But it is well written and creates real people in real situations. I recommend it.

(view spoiler)

I would recommend both the movie and the book, but they're different stories.

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### **Marquise says**

Dear me, is this book so bleak and depressing yet at the same time weirdly comforting . . . No, comfort is the wrong word, but I can't find another right now. The courage and determination of the protagonist in the face

of hopelessness and cynicism is maybe what confers on it that small upbeat dying note and makes it an excellent read.

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### **Edward Erdelac says**

I'm afraid the Don Siegel John Wayne movie colored my enjoyment of this a bit as well. It's superbly written, but awfully cynical compared to the uplifting movie. Books is the same man as the Duke portrays, but Gillom is extremely different - I didn't care for him at all in the novel version, and the ending bleeds a star off my rating.

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### **Željko Obrenovi? says**

Poslednji dani matorog revolveraša.

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### **Kusaimamekirai says**

It's 1901 and a stranger has just rolled into town. Known throughout the country as the most dangerous "shootist" alive, J.B. Books has come to El Paso, Texas on a mission. He's here to see a doctor. J.B. Books, 51 years old, is slowly and painfully dying of cancer and this is where he knows his life which "hasn't been worth a damn" will end.

But much like his chaotic and unpredictable life up to this point, things will not end quietly. Before he goes he will encounter a string of visitors to his room seeking by turns to exploit, profit off of, or kill him. Before it's all over events will come to a head where nobody is really sure who the good or bad truly are.

I found this to be a deeply affecting and philosophical look at death, and a reflection on what we truly leave behind (if anything) when we're gone. There are multiple ways to read this book and it's moral(if there is one).

One is that Books was a violent and unrepentant man in life who while he claims killed only in self defense, seems unlikely given the volume of killings attributed to him and the pride he takes in his reputation. That at the end of his life when he's weakened and the people he's harmed see a chance to harm or exploit him, the jump at the chance. Should we feel pity for him? Or is this the proverbial chickens coming home to roost? The second moral could be that Books has come to realise through his illness that the end is near and wants to set certain things right, such as setting the son of the boarding house woman on the right path, therefore he is indeed deserving of our pity.

Does any amount of righteousness at this point however make up for the mayhem his life has caused?

I don't have any easy answers to the questions this book poses but it is certainly profound and not one I will easily forget.

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### **Wayne Barrett says**

The date is 1901, the turn of the century and John Bernard Books is one of the last of the great gunmen. Being one of the deadliest shootists of the old west, Books succeeded in outliving most, if not all, of the other notorious gunslingers. But at the age of 51 he finally met his match, and it didn't come in the form of

lead.

Upon examination from an old doctor acquaintance that had previously removed a slug from his stomach, Books discovers that his days are numbered and it is nothing that the quick draw of his Remingtons will be able to match.

Books knows he is headed for a showdown with Death himself, but he decides even though he knows it will be a losing battle, he will be going out on his own terms and with guns blazing.

This western was an entertaining and well worth the read.

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### **J.K. Grice says**

The western classic by Glendon Swarthout. I enjoyed this book, and I liked the film version starring John Wayne. Wayne insisted on changing the ending in the movie, and I think I liked it better than the ending of the novel.

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### **Bettie? says**

[Bettie's Books (hide spoiler)]

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